

Personal Maturity of Adopting Parents as a Condition for Preventing Social Orphanage

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ABSTRACT

The research conducted deals with the problem of development of personal maturity in adopting parents. The objectives of the research are to describe the content foundation of the adopting parents' personal maturity represented by motivational and value-related, emotional, cognitive and activity-related components, to prove the influence of personal maturity of adopting parents on the efficiency of adoption parenting. Based on the analysis of theoretical and methodological standpoints and the empirical data obtained, the particularities of personal maturity of adopting parents are represented. The content foundation of adopting parents' personal maturity is considered. The study was conducted during the adaptation period of children entering the adopting family. The respondents were 40 adopting parents aged 30 to 57 and 35 adopted children aged 7-15. The results of the study have allowed revealing the key particularities of the adopting parents' personal maturity ensuring not only the efficiency of adoption parenting but also acting as a condition of preventing the social orphanage.

KEYWORDS

Personal maturity, adopting parents, social orphanage, prevention, stable structure

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Introduction

One of the acutest social problems of Russia has been the social orphanage that is conditioned by the persisting social and economic crisis, decrease of the population life level, its social and economic stratification and multiple violations of children's rights. The higher quantity of social orphans in our country is also associated with the peculiar social conditions and social processes in Russia: wars, industrialization and collectivization, the results of the early 1990s' restructuring etc. On top of that, the situation is aggravated not only by the slump of the life level of Russian families but also by destruction of the moral values of the family: increasing number of parents leading an asocial life, the surrendered newborn and so on.

Orphanage is a social phenomenon, a special way of life of minors who left without parental support, dependence on other people. Although the greater part of orphan children get placed in adopting families, they number almost 720 thousand in total at present.

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It is common knowledge that prevention of social orphanage includes mainly the work with disadvantaged families, in particular, revealing the bad families, conducting the nation-wide campaign of preventing the abuse of minors and breach of children's rights since 2010, implementing the integrated programs for adolescents and young families. Yet this kind of work is not carried out throughout Russia and at times it yields no results.

As of today, the interest of adult population in "adoption" parenting has increased and a significant growth of quantity of the people having become "substitute" (adopting) parents. For a full-fledged socialization of orphan children and of those left without parental support, as well as for preventing the social orphanage, the state creates conditions for settling their life in a family way, with one of the priority directions of its policy put forward being the placement of such children into "substitute" families. However, the practical necessity of acquisition of family experience by the boarding school children comes into conflict with the process of development of the step-families institute. With regard to this, in Russia, Federal law dated 01.09.2012 No. 351-FZ became effective that provides for introduction of compulsory training for persons willing to adopt an orphan child in their families.

According to statistics, in Lipetsk region, the quantity of orphans and children left without parental support makes 3642 people, of them 593 children are brought up in permanently adopting families, 1730 are under custody, and 899 are in foster care or adoption families. No doubt, this is the result of a large-scale campaign of placing the orphan children into families, and in this direction, the activity especially gained pace after Dima Yakovlev Law was passed. The figures are clearly bloomy, yet there is a marked trend of adopting parents surrendering the children. Regrettably, there are virtually no openly accessible data about the incidence of surrendering the children by adopting families.

According to the webportal of the Russian Federation Government 56 thousand children have been placed to adopting families in the current year and annually 5,1 thousand children are brought back to residential care facilities. The social phenomenon was named "repeated orphanage", as the parents fail at upbringing of the adopted children.

There is no deny that orphan children need a family but children have to be placed to the families who are already prepared for it, in the psychological respect too. Meanwhile, the preparation of potential adopting parents is often carried out in a formal manner, without the level of personal development of the adults and possible deviations in the orphan children's development taken into account, which results in further difficulties in interaction, especially at the adolescence.

Literature Review

The problems of interpersonal communication "child vs. parent" in an adopting family and ones of preparation of the potential adopting parents are reflected in a variety of psychological and pedagogical, sociological studies (Andreeva, 2009; Gerasimova, 2009; Oslon, 2001; Petrovskaya, 1982; Shvetsova, 2013; Voznyuk, Melchenko & Savitskaya, 2005; Gusarova, 2001; Taseev, 2014; Chernyshova, 2004).

However, the problem of child and parent relationships in an adopting family is determined not only by the defects of physical and mental development of the children which cannot be detected at an early age, by the adopting parents refusal from the assistance of qualified specialists, by the social advertisement creating the illusion of adoption to be a profitable deal etc., but also by the level of personal maturity of the potential and actual adopting parents. Sadly enough, this aspect is not reflected in the

psychological and pedagogical research – it is only the individual issues of the development of the adopting parents' personal qualities are considered.

G.G. Filippova (2009), a psychologist, when determining the psychological readiness of parents for upbringing of an adopted child, singles out the personal readiness including the general personal maturity (a relevant age and gender identification; a capacity for decision making and undertaking the responsibility for life and health of the adopted child; a solid bond to the child) and the personal qualities (taking the orphan as he or she is; capacity for joint activity with children and other members of the family; the interest in the development of the adopted child; the interest in the activity of raising and upbringing of adopted children and so on).

By the psychological readiness for parenting, S.Yu. Meshcheryakova understands the personal background and subject-to-subject orientation in relation to the child (Meshcheryakova, Avdeeva & Ganoshenko, 1996). Another researcher, T.E. Kotova (2011), singles out the social and psychological and personal characteristics of readiness for substitute parenting: this is the ambition to find personal meanings of one's existence in the world, worldview and value-related beliefs, learning of oneself, etc.

When studying the problem of successful adoption parenting, O.G. Yaparova (Nikolaeva & Yaparova, 2007) highlights the following social and psychological determinants: flexibility of attitudes, tolerance, self-control, attitude to parenting as a mechanism of self-fulfillment.

The authors agree with O.G. Yaparova (Nikolaeva & Yaparova, 2007) confirming the viewpoint that two groups, successful and unsuccessful ones, can be singled out among the adopting parents. However, they believe that such a division is conditioned not only by the experience of upbringing of their own children, personal qualities, behavior strategies of the adopting parents, but also by their personal maturity which determines the successfulness of the adoption parenting.

The researcher V.M. Rusalov (2006) considers tolerance, development of need of closeness, sensitivity to needs of another person, responsibility, ability to risk etc. to be the basic components of personal maturity. By responsibility, S.L. Rubinstein (1989) understands the ability to be responsible for oneself and for lives of other people, for the relationships between oneself and the people. The author believes that self-fulfillment of personality – an index of personal maturity and at the same time condition of its achievement – is associated with responsibility.

In the opinion of E.I. Zakharova (2014), parenting is a dynamic phenomenon implying the rise and development, quality transformation of the subject, generativity manifesting itself in the ability to self-fulfill in the care about the rise of the next generation. With regard to this, the researcher points to the fact that generativity is the most important acquisition of the maturity of personality and it is expressed in the need of self-actualization, in a creative perception of habitual situations during upbringing of children, in emergence of new meanings, new understanding of a problem situation in interaction with children and inclusion into more complicated situations.

Together with this, according to A.G. Asmolov (2007), the processes of self-consciousness, self-comprehension, enrichment of I-concept are stimulated during self-reflection. That is, the parents have to not only reproduce the internal picture of the world of a child but also transform it, develop it demonstrating moderation and patience.

Expressing their solidarity with the Russian researchers V.A. Sitarov & V.G. Maralov (2000), the authors also understand by tolerance the ability of parents to



accept the child's opinion, the ability to keep their temper, to not feel superiority during interaction with children. One of the mechanisms of interpersonal perception ensuring a tolerant attitude of parents to children is empathy which is expressed in the ability to place oneself into the child's shoes, and in the capacity for the voluntary emotional response to the children's feelings.

Undoubtedly, the process of self-actualization of personality of the parents has to be oriented to achievement of special values that act as norms of human existence, stable motivational formations. The value reference points ensure determination and consistency of behavior of the parents, the continuity of interactions with children. The values being a component of the structure of the parents' personal maturity act as a result of an intense inner work, reappraisal of values, and they ensure a positive interaction with children.

The results of the personally mature parents' learning of themselves, of personal expressions of the children stimulate occurrence of creativity in interaction with children. Creativity is expressed in the ability to generate brand new ideas and it initiates cooperation and spiritual closeness with the child.

Personal maturity of adopting parents is viewed by the authors as an integral social and psychological formation of the personality that consists of the following components: motivational and value-related, cognitive, emotional, and activity-related.

The pivot formation of the motivational and value-related component are value reference points determining the extent of personal maturity of adopting parents. The value reference points, as E.V. Shorokhova (1987) writes, are associated with the personality's accumulating life experience, world outlook, they are qualities of the personality that are characterized by a relative stability, permanence, giving qualitative determination to the personality.

Value reference points play the decisive part in the structure of moral consciousness, moral practice of the adopting parents and they act as a filter for such social and psychological elements as emotions, feelings etc. The fact is generally known that the level of development of value reference points in parents influences their motivation of adopting the orphan children.

O.G. Yaparova (Nikolaeva & Yaparova, 2007) and other researchers have found that to the successful adopting parents, the constructive aspects of adoption motivation are peculiar. Their ambition to prepare the adopted children for life with their personal particularities, past experience of living at a residential care facility and biological family borne in mind has been revealed. These parents perceive the orphan child just as the child is, regardless of the child's past and without comparing him or her with other children. With the successful adopting parents, the motives of the meaning of life prevail that enable them to determine their life objectives and tasks, need of self-actualization, reflexiveness.

In the opinion of R.V. Ovcharova (2005), the cognitive component of personal maturity of adopting parents reflects three levels of presentation of the parents' attitudes and expectations: reproductive ones, ones in the relationships between children and parents, and ones related to the child's image.

According to the research by E. Mesh & D. Volf (2003), the specific nature of adopting parents' behavior is determined by the attitudes associated with traditions, values, norms and expectations that depend directly on this or that family belonging to a social, cultural, national and religious environment.

However, as V.N. Oslon (2002) maintains, the efficiency of adoption parenting is determined by the original reason for creating the adopting family. With regard to this,

factors can be identified that allow evaluating the criteria of successfulness / unsuccessfulness of the adopting families (the extent of adaptability to new social roles of all family members when an adopted child is included in it; the adopting parents' feeling guilt to the adoptee for insufficient love for the child as compared to their own children; personal particularities of parents and their flexibility in the upbringing process; lack of information on the upbringing of adopted children etc.).

Thus, the cognitive component reflects the dynamic life activity that on the one hand allows the adopting parents to make free choices and bear responsibility for them, and on the other hand to see the child an equal-right member of the family who has got his or her own opinion, emotions and feelings that are significant and valuable. All this furthers the upbringing of children by personally mature adopting parents for whom the important point is not the correction of disadvantages but the development allowing for creativity and self-fulfillment.

In line with K.K. Platonov's (1986) psychological structure of personality, the activity-related component of personal maturity includes knowledge, abilities, skills, social norms and the formed behavioral experience. The main constituent of the activity-related component is activity and the result obtained during it.

Structurally, the activity-related component of personal maturity of adopting parents is represented by the parents' attitude, their standpoints, responsibility and upbringing style.

The parental attitude is composed of various elements of emotional and value-related attitude that changes depending on circumstances and life situations. It is expressed during the contact of the adult with the child, during controlling his actions, and during the upbringing actions. According to A.Ya. Varga (1986), the type of parental attitude and structural proportion of its components depend on the individual particularities of the parents and on the age of the child.

The parents' standpoints render the interactions with the child. They are based on conscious and unconscious evaluation of the latter. The parental responsibility is the responsibility to themselves and to the society. It is characterized by the role occupied by the parent in the family upbringing. The family style expresses the interaction of the above components.

The activity-related component in personally mature adopting parents characterizes the positive actions that on the one hand orient the adults to self-cognition, self-development, self-fulfillment and on the other hand represent the skills of interaction with the child (an ability to bring one's feelings across to the child, to hear the child, to help resolve a conflict situation etc.); thirdly, the ability to demonstrate in reality the love and acceptance of the child.

Proceeding from the above, the adopting parents' personal maturity is viewed as a dynamic integral formation represented by mutually activating structural components (the motivational and value-related, cognitive, emotional, and activity-related ones) that ensure the development of the children's inner picture of the world and the tolerant attitude towards orphan children.

Research Methods

The theoretical aspect of the pending problem of the adopting parents' personal development has determined the elaboration of the content of the practical part of the research. The objective of the research is to study the development level of adopting parents' personal maturity as a condition for prevention of social orphanage.



Hypothesis of the research is as follows: the authors have supposed that personal maturity of adopting parents act as a condition for preventing the social orphanage if:

- the development of the content of structural components of personal maturity (the motivational and value-related, cognitive, emotional, and activity-related ones) ensures the efficiency of adoption parenting that is determined by the extent of mutual adaptation of the substitute family members and the figures of the adopted child's personal development (satisfaction of the child's needs, integrity and dynamic character of the development);
- the content of structural components of the adopting parents' personal maturity reflects the implementation of certain values – need of self-cognition, self-development, self-fulfillment; a tolerant attitude to personal manifestations of the children; a bulk of a parent's ideas about himself or herself as a responsible person and about the child as an equal-right family member; skills of cooperation with the child.

The specific nature of development of adopting parents' personal maturity was identified and the dependence of social orphanage prevention on the development level of adopting parents' personal maturity was revealed on the basis of the Center for development of family forms of placement and socialization of children left without parental support and for social orphanage prevention "SemYA" (Lipetsk), departments for custody and guardianship of Lipetsk region (Yelets, Chaplygin) during 2015-2016. 40 adopting parents aged 30 to 57 and 35 adopted children aged 7-15 were the respondents. The survey was conducted during the adaptation period of the children's entering the adopting family.

For studying the development level of personal maturity in adopting parents, the following diagnostic techniques were used. Tolerance was diagnosed using the verbal frustration test L.N. Sobchik (2007), self-actualization test (SAT) by E. Shostrom was used to determine the value reference points, flexibility of behavior in the form represented in S.V. Markova (2012) work. I.M. Yusupov's technique "Capacity for empathy" (1995) helped diagnose empathy associated with attitudes of the adopting parents to building the possible response in various circumstances, understanding the emotional condition of a child.

The development of reflexivity in adopting parents that ensures the analysis of what is happening, their capacity for comparing their actions with the situation and for coordinating them up to the changing conditions, understanding of the children's personal manifestations was studied using the technique by E.E. Rukavishnikova (2000). For studying creativity of the parents, the authors applied the technique "What is your creative capacity?" by L.A. Wortman represented in S.V. Markova (2012) publication, that allows revealing the particularities of development of creativity in adopting parents.

The attitudes and responses of parents were explored by means of PARI technique that allowed studying the attitude of adopting parents to various sides of family life. The unfinished sentence method helped reveal the leading motives of parenting. A.Ya. Varga (1986) questionnaire test of parent's attitude also helped find out the parent's attitude to orphan children.

The specific nature of intrafamily relationships was identified by the "Draw your family" test making clear the particularities of intrafamily relationships and the child's perception of family members and of himself or herself. For studying the interpersonal relations of orphan children, their social adaptation to adopting family conditions, the technique of René-Gilles was used.

Results and Discussion

The results of the research have shown that a stable structure of value reference points, independence of values and parent's behavior on the external influence, and an active life standpoint are peculiar to personally mature adopting parents. Their attitude to continuous development of their capacities, tolerant attitude in interaction with children and the ambition to be responsible for lives of their children have been revealed. The main values of successful adopting parents are morals and outlook. Thus, in adopting parents, a trend to continuous development of their capacity and humanistic orientation in interaction with children have been found. The parents believed themselves to be responsible for lives of the adopted children, tended to use the constructive ways of overcoming the trouble situations, and to live the present point of life to the full.

The development of value reference points in personally mature adopting parents conditioned the choice of constructive aspects of adoption motivation. The most widespread motives for adoption, as the analysis of the tested ones' answers in the unfinished sentence method has shown, are the wish to fulfill oneself as a parent, to prepare the child for life, the wish to have a large family, to gain meaning of life, and to compensate for bad childhood experience. The motivation has an undoubtedly positive character and it reflects the development level of the parents' personal maturity that is conditioned not only by the experience of upbringing of their own children, but also by the wish to love an adopted child and take care of the child, to be responsible for the children's lives.

The pivot profile of behavior of personally mature adopting parents was a tolerant, understanding attitude to children, taking them as they are, without getting irritated and without comparing them to their own children. Empathy and love for children orienting towards the cause of action and not to the very child's action helped overcome irritability. This group of parents adopted the children not because of the first emotional move (to make an orphan child happy), not because of the external likeness signs, but due to guidance of the responsibility to the society, their own conscience, a stable standpoint of the future parents as for creating a full-fledged family, and emergence of a new meaning in the content of parenting. With regard to this, the parents initially had no question "Will I be able to love the adopted child?" arising. The parental love for adopted children was manifested first of all by the responsibility, self-sacrifice, consolidation of the personal in children and the ambition to become the tower of strength for the children.

In the structure of the adopting parents' parental love for orphan children, the content of personal maturity was clearly fulfilled: the emotional compassion, the parents' knowledge of personal particularities of their child, a tolerant attitude to the child's actions, expression of love in certain situations, an unconditional acceptance of the child etc.

Expression of love for children was conditioned by the development of such quality as empathy determining the emotional stability and psychological adaptation in interaction with children. In personally mature parents, the "ability to reasonably estimate the actual pedagogical situation, on the one hand, and the capacity to foresee the exit from the situation, on the other" was clearly traced (Mitina, 1996). The parents' self-adjustment of their mental condition was manifested in the abilities to control their moods, in preventing the emergence of stress conditions in children, of conflict situations, the ability to keep restraint in various situations (especially during the orphan children's adaptation to the conditions of the adopting family).

Surely, the emotional stability of adopting parents is associated to emotional positivism, capacity for self-reflection of one's emotional conditions and feelings. It has



been stated by experiment, that Spearmen's correlation coefficient between the

$$r_s = 1 - \frac{6 \cdot \sum D^2}{n \cdot (n^2 - 1)}$$

attributes calculated according to the formula (here D - difference between ranks in two variables for each tested one, n - quantity of ranked attributes) is approximately equal to $r_s = 0,993$, which corresponds to a strong positive connection. Domination of such an emotional stance promotes the positive condition of children, increase of their capacity to work, reduction of anxiety, enhancement of non-verbal and verbal contact with adults.

According to the results of the verbal frustration test, the frustrated values of personally mature adopting parents are outlook and morals. In the frustration situation, the parents manifested the wish to undertake responsibility for a conflict situation with orphan children, tolerance, emotional stability, creativity. At the same time, the parents' expressing interest in various skills of the adopted children, including them into various activities (gameplay, work etc.), a creative approach to resolving difficult situations helped establish trusting relationships, increase the self-esteem and optimism in children. The significance of dependence between empathy and creativity has been confirmed by experiment by means of Spearmen's correlation coefficient the test value of which made $r_s = 0,998$, which is indicative of a strong positive connection.

The quantity indices validly prove the provision about dependence between empathy, self-reflection and creativity of personally mature adopting parents. The integral interrelation of the personal qualities of this group of parents provides expression of empathy which activates self-reflection, a need of self-actualization, and creativity. When checking the null statistical hypothesis of the random character of differences between the measured indices (empathy, self-reflection, creativity), the authors have found that the empirical value of Friedman's criterion calculated

$$\chi_{\phi p}^2 = \frac{12}{n \cdot c \cdot (c + 1)} \cdot \sum R_i^2 - 3n \cdot (c + 1)$$

according to the formula (here c - quantity of conditions, n - quantity of the tested ones, R_i - sums of ranks for each condition) equals $\chi_{\phi p}^2 = 8184,2$, which is validly more than the critical value of Friedman's criterion $\chi_{\phi p, kp}^2 (0,05; 78) = 99,6$. Therefore, there are grounds to decline the null hypothesis and to accept the alternative consisting in the validity of distinctions between the measured indices.

The analysis of experimental data has allowed revealing the succession of the cognitive and activity-related components of personal maturity of adopting parents. Statistically, the thesis was confirmed by a high value of Spearmen's correlation coefficient between the attributes ($r_s = 0,97$). This was reflected in gnostical, constructive, organizational, communicative, reflexive abilities as a total determining the efficiency of adoption parenting.

The gnostical abilities were manifested in personally mature adopting parents in knowing not only the psychological and pedagogical, but also medical, economic, and legal aspects of life activity of the family. Yet the main result of accumulation of such knowledge was the adults' general culture penetrating into all relationship vectors and giving them an important humanistic meaning.

During the upbringing of an adopted child, there may be problems due to lack of knowledge about social and psychological, mental and physical development of the child, this is why the adopting parents need certain psychological and pedagogical knowledge: about the psychological particularities of orphans; about methods, forms and means of cooperation with special needs children; about the specific nature of the adopting family and its role in the system of childhood protection institutions; about the content of adopting parents' pedagogical activity, and so on. According to the results of the research, the personally mature adopting parents could name the methods, forms, and the content of their joint activity with the adopted children.

The adopting parents had the abilities to construct both their own activity and the child's activity with orientation to the objectives of the upbringing, which demonstrates a conscious character of their choice of forms and methods of interaction and is ultimately a pledge of successful relationships with the children. Moreover, the personally mature adopting parents can foresee the results of using the various upbringing methods, plan the pedagogical process aimed at overcoming the existing disadvantages in the adopted child's development and behavior. The statistical interrelation of the activity-related component and attitude to children has also been identified experimentally using Spearmen's correlation coefficient ($r_s = 0,982$) and it confirms a strong positive connection.

The organizer capacities in personally mature adopting parents were demonstrated in their ability to create a compensating and developing environment for a child, in stimulating the child's activity towards the surrounding phenomena, in the ability to create conditions for the development of the child's cognitive processes, moral and value-related attitudes and socially important personal qualities.

The communicative abilities in personally mature adopting parents were manifested in the equality of standpoints of adults and adopted children, in mutual action on each other, absence of evaluation marks, complete acceptance, respect and trust in communication, the ability of adopting parents to show, understand and appropriately use a wide and diverse range of communication means including non-verbal ones.

The practice of the authors of the study points to the low incidence of returning of orphan children to residential care facilities by personally mature adopting parents. The parental expertise and psychological resources that are up to the personal development helped them master efficient methods of interaction with children, reduce the quantity of critical remarks, create a psychologically comfortable atmosphere during communication, which determined the improvement of personal and social qualities of the adopting parents.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research conducted allows making the following conclusions: the process of returning the social orphans by adopting parents can be prevented and the children can be released from "repeated orphanage" if the personal maturity of the potential adopting parents is diagnosed as a preventive measure, as well as if the process of their preparation to efficient adoption parenting is organized purposefully. The elaborated diagnostics technique consisting of tests and tasks that allow characterizing the motivational and value-related, emotional, cognitive and activity-related components of the potential adopting parents' personal maturity. It also helps reveal the level of personal maturity development implying the overcoming of deprivation disorders in orphaned children. The results of experimental data confirm the provision about the adopting parents' personal maturity being a total of certain characteristics of their



personalities conditioning the opportunity of socialization and prevention of the children's repeated orphanage.

The results of the scientific research can be recommended for familiarization and implementation to departments of custody and guardianship, potential and actual adopting parents, Centers of assistance to family raising, psychologists etc.

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